
testimony

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Good morning, Chairman Beltz, members of the committee, and esteemed colleagues. My name is Lois Schneider, and I am a lifelong resident of North Dakota. It is an honor to speak in support of House Bill 1529, which would qualify former Peace Corps volunteers for in-state tuition at North Dakota's colleges and universities.

This bill is more than just a financial incentive for returning Peace Corps volunteers; it is a strategic opportunity to attract civic-minded individuals who embody the values of service, resilience, and global perspective to North Dakota.

Nearly a quarter of a million Americans have served in more than 140 countries at 2600 sites, including 600 North Dakotans. Currently 3,500 are serving in 60 countries. Most will have bachelor's degree. They would be expected to excel in higher education.

I had the privilege of serving in the United States Peace Corps from 1968 to 1970, working in India in health and nutrition at a primary teacher education school. Before that, I was a proud student at North Dakota State University. Those years at NDSU instilled in me the values of leadership and community that carried me through my Peace Corps service and beyond.

After completing my service and furthering my education in graduate school, I made the intentional decision to return to North Dakota. Here, I raised a family and continued to serve my home state as a public employee. I can say with confidence that my Peace Corps experience enriched not only my life but also the lives of those I served in North Dakota.

HB1529 is a simple yet impactful way to recruit talented, service-oriented individuals to North Dakota. Former Peace Corps volunteers are uniquely equipped to contribute to our state in the following ways:

1. Strengthening Our Workforce:

Peace Corps alumni possess critical skills in education, public health, agriculture, and community development—sectors that are vital to North Dakota’s economy. These individuals are problem-solvers who adapt to challenges and work collaboratively, traits that make them valuable contributors to our communities.

2. Enriching Campus and Community Life:

By offering in-state tuition, North Dakota can attract individuals with unique experiences and perspectives. These students bring global insights and cultural competence that enhance the learning environment for all students. Their presence fosters the kind of innovation and understanding that helps prepare North Dakota’s students to thrive in an interconnected world.

3. Supporting Rural Revitalization:

North Dakota faces challenges in retaining and recruiting residents, particularly in rural areas. Peace Corps volunteers are accustomed to living in remote and underserved communities. Their commitment to service and adaptability makes them ideal candidates to settle in and contribute to rural communities across the state.

4. Aligning with North Dakota Values:

The spirit of the Peace Corps—service, perseverance, and a commitment to making a difference—resonates deeply with the values of North Dakotans. As someone who has lived these values in both my service and my return to North Dakota, I know firsthand the mutual benefits of creating opportunities for individuals who share this mindset to join our communities.

Offering in-state tuition to former Peace Corps volunteers is a small investment with a significant return. It sends a clear message that North Dakota values service and is committed to building a vibrant, inclusive future by attracting individuals who are ready to roll up their sleeves and make a difference.

HB1529 honors the legacy of service while ensuring that North Dakota remains a welcoming and innovative state. I urge you to vote in favor of this bill and take this meaningful step toward enriching our colleges, communities, and workforce with talented, civic-minded individuals who have already demonstrated their commitment to service.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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I am happy to answer any questions.